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AN EDUCATIONAL REVOLUTION.

BY HAROLD E. GORST.

EVERY day the subject of education is attracting more attention. We have at last reached the point, in the history of modern civilization, where it has become alarmingly apparent, at least to a few of us, that something is vitally wrong with the whole system of educating young people and developing their faculties. The failure lies glaringly before our eyes; but, with the extraordinary blindness of human beings, the vast majority of us have never, for a moment, connected cause with effect. We have seen ourselves surrounded by social evils of the most harmful character, and have hitherto been contented to regard them as inevitable features of modern life, due to the ordinary stress of circumstances. Some of us, however—unhappily, yet but a small minority—are awakening to the fact that the trouble is deep-seated; that it lies, not with the common economic factors of our daily existence, such as overcrowding, competition, degeneration and so forth, but with some fundamental fallacy by which the normal development and progress of the human race is impeded.

What is this fallacy? I claim no novelty for the discovery that it is absolutely and entirely concerned with the fact that the youth of the nation, here and elsewhere, is being educated upon a general principle which is not only bad in theory, but little short of ruinous in practice. How this absurd theory of education has managed to survive for centuries upon centuries I will not stop to inquire. The probability is that it is because its pernicious results have been confined, in the past, to a comparatively small minority. It is only within the last two generations that it has been expanded into a practically universal system, applicable to the entire population; and, therefore, the acute evil of its effects has just commenced to manifest itself to an appreciable extent.

All the ancient schools of which anything is known, from those in India and Egypt down to those at Athens and Rome, were conducted upon the same principle of instructing in accordance with a cast-iron programme of knowledge to be instilled by force of discipline. The traditional method was handed on to the church schools of the Middle Ages, to the Latin schools which developed from them, and to the schools of to-day, which, in the majority of cases, have been modelled upon the latter. Nobody—except a few isolated reformers working in obscure corners of the Old and New Worlds—seems to have dreamed of questioning, much less of challenging, the soundness of this crude and antiquated theory of education. Once a thing has been systematized and officially organized into a permanent social institution, the independent thinker who grasps its imperfections and enormities finds himself not only coming into violent conflict with the compact mass of tradition-bound, blind and interested units that go to form this system, but running into a stone wall of public credulity rooted in prejudice.

Let there be no misunderstanding on this point. A stupendous array of educational zeal has been directed, all the world over, for the last quarter of a century or more, towards extending and improving the school system. Millions upon millions have been wasted upon every conceivable kind of educational endowment. In England, in particular, large sums of money have been expended, almost lavished, upon equipping the elementary schools with the most varied and complicated apparatus that human ingenuity could devise, with the result that the financial burden imposed upon the British rate-payer is beginning slowly to goad him on to some feeble and vague protest on the score of expense. Training colleges for teachers have sprung up on all sides like mushrooms, letting loose upon the educational world an army of instructors drilled, in the most efficient way, to persuade children, as gently and firmly as possible, into the educational strait-waistcoat. All this has happened within our own knowledge, and is going on now—with ever-increasing zeal, amounting almost to delirium—under our noses and to the tune of a swelling chorus of public eulogy.

But nobody has come boldly forward to challenge the principle upon which this modern educational energy is going to work. The principle has been tacitly accepted by the vast majority of

people. It has even, apparently, been taken on trust by the army of misguided philanthropists who have been vying with one another, of late years, in pouring wealth into every crevice of the whole field of education. I do not deny for a moment, therefore, that the school and college system is developing and growing by leaps and bounds. All I desire to do is to warn the public that this educational ferment must not, on any account, be confounded with genuine reform. Far from this being the case, it is a dangerous and pernicious, although well-intentioned, bolstering up and multiplication of one of the greatest factors for active evil by which the world has ever been cursed.

Although the United States and Great Britain have fundamentally the same education system, the schools and colleges of the two countries differ sufficiently, in some respects, to necessitate a brief comparative survey before examining the problem at close quarters. In the first place, the American system is far more efficiently organized than the English system. It is no idle boast that a direct path has been provided, in the former, from the gutter to the University. But education in England is still in a hopeless muddle. The elementary schools are confused and unsettled; they overlap in the most wasteful way; and there is no road, except by way of scholarships for the privileged few, to higher education. Consequently, the children of the working-classes, in England, are turned adrift at the age of fourteen, fitted for nothing, and without individuality, initiative or the smallest realization of aptitude for anything in particular. The thoroughly efficient organization of education in the United States, coupled with the fact that the child of the poorest laborer can get a free education right through to the age of eighteen, proves, on the other hand, how high a value the American people set upon the advantages of a school and college training; and how ready they are to support and foster any institution which they believe to be in the interests of the nation and of the individual.

English and American universities differ mainly in spirit. They are all of them fit for little else than the turning out of a rather useless type of scholar; but the University authorities in the United States appear at least to be fully alive to the fact that practical and business life demands another type of man. Realizing this, they are constantly experimenting in the hope of hitting

upon a method of training and supplying the right article. This is, at any rate, laudable. It shows that a most valuable spirit has crept into higher education on this side of the Atlantic, and that American citizens are too practical a people to ignore the fact that their system is faulty and that it contains, somewhere or other, some grave blunder. As nobody in England, except those directly concerned in educational work, takes the slightest interest in the problem of education, it is quite clear that reform, when it comes there, will have to come from within. The outlook in the United States, judging from all I have previously read and heard, as well as from my own brief experience in the country, is much more hopeful. Reform in the right direction may not only be generated within the inner circle of educationists—some of whom, I can affirm from my own knowledge, are at least partly aware of the evils of the present system—but will eventually be insisted upon from without. Whatever defects Americans may have as citizens—on that point I am wholly uninformed—they certainly display the most intense and practical interest in educational matters; they realize, as British parents do not appear to realize, that the education of their children, on right lines, is a thing of paramount importance. Some of them may be blind believers in the present system; but there is every indication that the majority are by no means disposed to take its perfection for granted. The average American is not only a practical, but also an elastic-minded, man. He is not wedded eternally to theories, and he believes only half what he sees. And besides this, there is a factor in the situation which must not be overlooked: The American woman is full of intellectual unrest. She wants to learn, and she cares nothing for accepted theories or antiquated traditions. So she is an individual to be reckoned with in the future; for the mother who takes an intelligent interest in the education of her children, and who applies her thinking powers without prejudice to the problem, will bring a new and powerful element into the question which nobody can afford to ignore.

Those who want to judge of the value of modern methods of education must judge by their results. It is no good looking at the aims and professions of the schools and colleges themselves. The whole social organization of Western civilization teems with anomalies, injustices and inequalities. Let them be examined im-

partially, and the intelligent observer will not be slow to comprehend how many of these evils are attributable, in the first instance, to the constant suppression of individuality by the education system. How many individuals, to begin with, have discovered their precise vocation to lie in the work they are compelled to do in order to earn their daily bread? The percentage of happy, contented people who are doing, consciously, just what they are fitted for is notoriously small. Is there a single person, possessing a tolerably wide circle of acquaintance, who cannot point to dozens of examples of individuals that are leading wasted and disappointed lives through pursuing an uncongenial occupation? There are writers, thinkers, artists and musicians eating their hearts out in Wall Street; there are engineers in the pulpit or driving street-cars; naturalists and farmers slaving away at figures in a counting-house; scholars masquerading as administrators; and men of action, the would-be pioneers of new and productive industries, bound hand and foot in some office of law or commerce. It is a pitiful story, the first chapter of which commenced in the elementary school. And it is something worse than cruelty to the individual. It is the canker which produces national inefficiency and national decay, and which multiplies mediocrity in every profession and occupation throughout the length and breadth of the land. A well-known Philadelphia professor testified publicly in my hearing, a few weeks ago, to the high percentage of men in technical colleges who were compelled to give up their course, because it was discovered, at the eleventh hour, that they had no aptitude for the vocation for which they were being trained.

That is the human side of this manufacture of mediocrity and wholesale misplacing of individuals. Now turn to the economic side. Is it not courting disaster to produce, year in year out, masses of men fitted with precisely the same mental equipment? Everybody recognizes the unhappy results of an excessive supply of labor in the industrial market; but nobody has pointed out the equally disastrous effect of an oversupply of University graduates, all equipped with the same ornamental, useless and half-baked literary accomplishments. The United States has escaped the worst economic evils that result from this practice of turning out uniformity from all the centres of education. But this is merely due to the circumstance that America is still a

young country of boundless resources and opportunity. The evil is there, nevertheless, slowly eating its way into the heart of the nation. In an old country like England, the appalling economic results of this incessant supply of machine-made scholars are only too apparent. Briefless barristers, literary hacks, broken-down University men, starving clergymen, doctors without patients, critics in garrets and ragged philosophers are as common there as pebbles on the seashore. People allude to them, with a shrug of the shoulders, as life's necessary failures, and are too lazy or too unobservant to attribute such an every-day feature of modern civilization to any traceable cause. Yet even the educational authorities themselves sometimes catch a glimmer of the truth. The Chancellor of an Irish University remarked, last October, in the course of an address to the students:

"One of the gravest dangers that can come upon any country is the existence of a large number of highly educated young men, who have no immediate or graduated outlet for their talents. It is wicked to give a man the highest education, and simply turn him loose on the world, and there is no necessity for this indignity. In any well-ordered country, such as Belgium or Germany, there are Government or private schemes which take up the scholar when he is leaving the University, and usher him onward into the line or path he may desire to tread. The whole tendency of life is now for men to take up special lines, electricity, engineering, medicine, industries, commerce, and to follow up that work from the earliest moment and progressively. Specialism is one of the greatest products of the day. What I say is required now is special work and special training."

There is yet another side to this problem of academic education, and that is the physiological. The whole plan of forcing a general education upon everybody—whether it be classical, mathematical or anything else in character—necessitates the cramming of the mind with facts, with ready-made opinions, with other people's ideas and borrowed reflections. This process of cramming is not a natural but an artificial process; and on this account—quite apart from the badness of its educational principle—it is actually injurious to the brain. This is no mere assertion on the part of a layman. Probably but few people have not come in contact with cases of mental breakdown through over-work in connection with scholarships, the passing of degrees, examinations and so forth. A system of mental training which threatens injury, even in a remote degree, to the brain, and

particularly to the brain of the most intellectually gifted, can hardly claim to be regarded as the right method of mental development. The best mental specialists in England are, at any rate, far from satisfied that education is being conducted on sound lines. When I occupied the position of private secretary to the English Minister of Education, a few years ago, I made inquiries on this point. Amongst other communications, I received replies from our two greatest experts on mental breakdown: Dr. Savage and Professor Maudsley. Their letters are a valuable and significant comment on our present methods of education, both elementary and academic, and I therefore print them in full.

Dr. Savage says:

"I now write in answer to your letter as to the evil effect of cramming and overeducation, as far as my experience is concerned. First of all, I must say that the cases in which pure and simple overworking an otherwise healthy subject produces mental illness are very few. First, the nervous boy or girl is often unusually bright and forward, and therefore is likely to be encouraged to do more than is good for him. Next, the general health of the child makes an enormous difference to the amount of work which may be overwork. I believe most harm occurs in forcing promising children; next, in forcing children who are not properly fed.

"I think that the strain of classics has produced more cases of breakdown than that of mathematics. But there it is rather rash to draw hasty conclusions, for accident may have brought more Oxford than Cambridge men under my notice. But my present impression is that the training to produce a Balliol scholar is a dangerous one. If the child is forced to take exercise, harm may be avoided. But here again, the boy certainly who is likely to suffer from work is the boy who avoids games. I find it difficult to provide the particular instances you need. I think every large public school produces boys of the following type: weakly, not given to games, with feeble digestion and weak circulation. They read and work very hard for scholarships; they are allowed, in some schools, to sit up at night almost to any hour they please. They have insufficient food, and their work is too much along one line.

"It may be necessary to cultivate a classical or a mathematical ability specially; but it is always associated with danger in the boy who is gifted."

Professor Maudsley, dealing with elementary education, writes:

"I am sorry that I am unable to give you the practical assistance which you require. I keep no notes of cases which come under my observation. The school-board system of cramming with smatterings, instead of teaching their victims to think—even if only by teaching one subject well—is perhaps responsible for some positive mental break-

down; but probably the main harm of it is that it stifles and strangles proper mental development. The vigorous brain of the healthy child suffers the cramming and forgets it; the dull and stupid brain protects itself by its stupidity; it is perhaps only the weak and sensitive brain of the neurotic child which, taking the inanities of school boards seriously, is actually broken down or permanently hurt. Undeveloped mentality is perhaps the principal fault of our educational system (so called)."

My indictment against the elementary school system—that is to say, the system of giving a general education to the children of the nation—contains three more serious counts to which attention may be specially drawn. In the first place, it practises a heartless deception upon the great mass of the people, who, in their ignorance, put a blind faith in the practical value of the training which the schools purport to give. They believe that their children are being endowed with indispensable knowledge, which will qualify them for superior situations and enable them to rise in life. It is a pathetic belief. The least critical person, gifted with ordinary intelligence, knows perfectly well how far removed it is from actuality. The elementary schools do not fit the children for any practical purpose whatever. Their net result is, on the contrary, to unfit them for the realities which they have to face when they find themselves compelled to earn their own bread. Large numbers of these victims, sharing the delusion of their parents, misjudge their educational qualifications. They are led in this way to despise honest labor, and even to look down upon the craftsmanship of the skilled artisan as being inferior to the mechanical occupation of a clerk or drudge, because the latter enables them to become a shabby imitation of the classes above them.

Then there is the undoubted fact—borne out by criminal records—that an unsuitable education often lies at the root of vice and dishonesty. There can hardly be a doubt that the present education system helps to manufacture criminals. In my official capacity at the English Board of Education, I corresponded, on this subject, with the chaplains of our principal prisons, and the answers received to the inquiries made left no doubt in my mind as to the pernicious results of a superficial general education upon certain classes of the community. Here are some significant extracts from a letter, written to the Minister of Education, in England, by one of these prison chaplains:

"My own opinion with regard to the present system of education is that it is liable to foster conceit, discontent, a disinclination to submit to discipline and authority, and a dangerous phase of ambition—which are fruitful sources of that kind of crime which is in these days most prevalent. A smattering of every kind of scientific information creates an intellectual dyspepsia, which makes life unwholesome in its source and action. It is surprising that, in these days of specialists, young people are not thoroughly taught the things which are needful for some definite pursuit in life. This superficial education causes, I think, self-deceit as well as self-conceit. It leads young people, in their desire to rise in the social scale, to attempt by dishonest methods to raise the means to live at a higher rate than is justifiable, to gamble and speculate, in order to keep up a false position.

"I have come across those who have fallen, where this has been admittedly the case; and who have lamented that such wrong ideas had been put into their heads. Young people now look upon many honorable and useful employments as beneath them; and there is a general rush for those which seem to offer a better social position. I am afraid much of this is due to the mistakes made in their early education."

The third count applies more generally to England than to the United States, although it is a pressing social problem in all large industrial centres where there is a poor and ignorant population. It lays to the charge of the elementary school system responsibility for the destruction of human life on a large scale. In London, New York and other great cities, the attention of the authorities has frequently been drawn to the alarming proportion that infant mortality bears to the general death-rate. A high percentage of this mortality is directly due to the ignorance of the mothers concerning the feeding and care of their infants. The President of the Obstetrical Society in London, in giving evidence before a Departmental Committee appointed to inquire into the subject of physical deterioration in Great Britain, stated that eighty-five per cent. of children were born physically healthy whatever the condition of the mother might be antecedently. Nature, he declared, intended all to have a fair start. And an array of eminent medical witnesses testified to the ignorance of the parents on the question of feeding infants. It is surely a bitter satire on our system of educating girls that, as soon as they become mothers, their homes have to be invaded by health visitors and tract-distributors in order that they may be taught the A B C of their domestic duties. The education system must therefore be held liable, so long as it neglects to give girls a prac-

tical training in this respect, for that large proportion of infant mortality which is due to the ignorance of the mothers.

Many charges might be preferred against the present education system; but at the bottom of them all lies the fundamental error that individuality is forcibly repressed by it; that everybody is manufactured to the same pattern, and that in the process of manufacture hereditary talents and individual traits are smothered by the perpetual heaping of knowledge on to the mind. The thing is so plain, so obvious and self-evident, that it is simply amazing to reflect how not only generations of scholars and pedants, but also generations of practical, active-minded men, should have continued unquestioningly to keep it going with their approval and support. Everybody has evidence of the crushing effect of modern education upon the mind and character right under his nose. Children, before they are sent to school, increase in the joy of life, in productive activity, in powers of observation, and in the passion for investigation, every day of their existence. From the moment they enter the schoolroom all is changed. The joy, the activity, the thirst for knowledge and inquiry—all are gone in the briefest possible period. From moving about, and from using his hands in obedience to an irresistible creative impulse, the child passes into a new and unreal world where he is compelled to sit still, and where, instead of investigating for himself, dull and prosaic facts are driven methodically into his mind. The imagination, just about to expand under the influences of natural development, contracts and withers; the brain is first dulled and then forced; the productive activity—except in a few experimental schools which have been established here and there in the face of public prejudice—is rigorously stamped out of existence altogether.

This criminal method of educating the young will, in the natural sequence of human progress, be revolutionized. The longer the revolution is put off the worse for the human race. Evolution has taught us that the use of faculties cannot be discontinued with impunity. The laws of nature are inexorable on this point; and when a muscle, or a bone, or a sense, or an individual trait remains unemployed, it fails to develop and ultimately disappears. Our education system neglects to cultivate the faculties with which a child has been specially endowed; it does not even make an attempt to discover what they are. People say that

education on such a plan would be too expensive; it would involve, they imagine, a teacher for every child. So it is generally accepted that the next best thing is to fix a standard of general knowledge, and drill it into the entire rising generation. It saves trouble and expense; and it has behind it, furthermore, the advantage of centuries of tradition. The consequences of this neglect cannot fail to react upon future generations. The faculties which education not only leaves undeveloped, but actually suppresses by forcing the mind into stereotyped channels, must tend, in the natural order of things, to die out. Therefore, hereditary talent and individuality will gradually be dissipated; with the result that the future race, weakened intellectually and even in a measure physically, will sink lower and lower in the scale of mediocrity and uniformity.

Enlightened educators, in all civilized countries, are beginning to realize the gravity of this danger, and are taking venturesome steps—undeterred by opposition and ridicule—to arrest its progress. Germany is already the field of experiment in this direction. Some of her best men have grasped the fact that, although Germany is ahead of all other nations in the successful manufacture of capable mediocrity, she is only succeeding, by her superiority in this respect, in bringing about the more rapidly the destruction of the finest intellectual material—inventive, creative, administrative and progressive—in the German nation. In Munich, and possibly elsewhere, the most splendid institutions have been founded, experimentally, for the discovery and development of individual tendency. Their success, in a practical country like Germany, may any day change the face of education as carried on there in the public schools and colleges. The idea has been caught up, to a certain extent, by English educationists working obscurely in holes and corners of the English school system; but even the strongest and most determined Minister of Education in England would find it almost impossible, in the compass of his brief five or six years of administration, to overcome the obstacles to reform ceaselessly placed in his way by the most obstinately conservative permanent officials in the English public service.

The United States is teeming with the spirit which should give the keenest impetus to an educational revolution of an intensely sane and practical character. Reformers on the right lines

are busily at work in the great cities of the New World, as elsewhere. What clogs their efforts is, no doubt, the prosperity and progress achieved hitherto, in spite of the detrimental influences of modern education. Enthusiastic American citizens—I have met them by the score—are too ready to attribute their virtues and achievements to the free education for which universal provision has been made, and to the work accomplished by schools and colleges of every type. This natural admiration for a really efficiently organized system of education (regarded merely as a "system") might well prove, eventually, to be the undoing of the American nation. But, if I understand anything of the American character, it will be discarded, fast enough, when once a doubt enters the mind of the people. The Americans are not tradition-bound like the inhabitants of the Old World. They are unsentimentally practical, almost to a fault. If education be found to be wanting, if it be proved to have been based on a false principle, it will be revolutionized in the United States by the irresistible pressure of public opinion.

In what direction will this revolution be pointed? As far as I comprehend the work which the most enlightened reformers are advocating and carrying on, in various countries, the ultimate revolution will be directed towards overturning the whole plan of giving, in the first instance, a general education. How far it may be realized, by these reformers, that a general education is in itself a pernicious thing, I do not pretend to know. The majority of them seem to have gone to work upon the assumption, not that the inculcation of a stereotyped quantity of facts destroys individuality and imagination, but that the hands should be trained as well as the mind. Following this path, they are stumbling gradually upon the truth; but although improvement will result from their methods, salvation must be sought upon far more drastic and revolutionary lines.

Training the hands, side by side with destroying the individual mind, is only a half measure. It is a praiseworthy endeavor to mitigate the evils of the present education system; but it can do no more than mitigate. The real problem is to preserve and to foster natural tendency and individual talent. Manual training may help a little in this direction, although its efforts are rendered largely abortive in proportion as they are made subsidiary to the cramming of the mind with general knowledge.

But it fails as a method of remedying present evils, because it does not perform the first essential duty of all genuine education: the setting itself, in a direct and scientific way, to discover the individual bent of each child.

There is only one practicable method by which this first and paramount object of education can be achieved. Children must not be sent to elementary schools to be taught, without any preliminary investigation into their capabilities and tendencies, the knowledge which is supposed to be essential to the average member of the community. These schools have cost the country hundreds, perhaps thousands, of millions. It cannot be helped; but, the sooner they are pulled down, the better for the interests of the nation. However excellent the teaching, these schools are hot-beds for the wholesale destruction of the individuality upon which the future might and greatness of the nation is dependent. They are worse than useless, unless they can be rebuilt to fulfil the requirements of a new kind of institution — conceived on a far broader basis, both constructively and educationally—in which the sound principles of a genuine education can be carried into effect. For it is not in schools of the existing type that measures can be taken to study the individual bent of the child. This can only be done by the provision, within the dimensions of one great institution, of such scope for individual capacity as would cover the whole range of productive activity. There must be workshops of various kinds, laboratories, kitchens, gardens, and, where practicable, even a farm. Every broad sphere of activity will have, as far as possible, to be represented. The children will thus be turned loose into a real world, full of interest, where they will not be subjected to mental and physical repression, and where their tastes will have full opportunity to develop and reveal themselves. Placed under skilled direction, it would not be difficult, in the course of a comparatively brief period, to ascertain, broadly, the capabilities of each child.

A certain percentage would doubtless display a natural inclination towards a purely literary training; but the vast majority, showing capacity for more practical and active spheres, would eventually have to be drafted off into schools of a new type, according to their individual necessities. These institutions would divide themselves naturally into broad, distinctive groups, each group containing its own complement of schools and colleges.

For instance, one group might embrace scholarship and scientific research; a second, engineering and other mechanical occupations; a third, art and the decorative trades; a fourth, farming and agriculture; a fifth, industry, commerce and finance; and so on. Every normal child would be found to belong, by predisposition, to some broad sphere of activity. It would therefore be the duty of the educators, in the great selecting institutions, first to discover the individual bent of the child, and then to recommend to the parents the course of special training to which he ought to be subjected. Probably enough, many existing technical colleges and other educational establishments would, with certain modifications, be readily adaptable to the giving of this special training, divided, as suggested above, into broad, distinctive groups.

I have only endeavored to give a rough indication of the lines upon which, in my belief, the impending educational revolution will be carried out. Its most significant and inevitable feature, I am convinced, will be the abolition and destruction of all elementary schools, and the substitution, in their place, of such institutions—workshops rather than schoolhouses—as I have sketched out, for the purpose of discovering and encouraging individual capability. It is only by such means that degeneration can be arrested; and that a strong and healthy nation can be built up, capable of achieving and sustaining a foremost place, both intellectually, morally and industrially, in the civilized world of the future.

HAROLD E. GORST.